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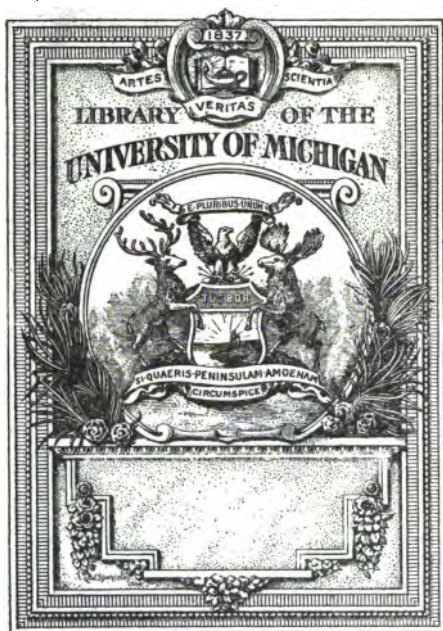
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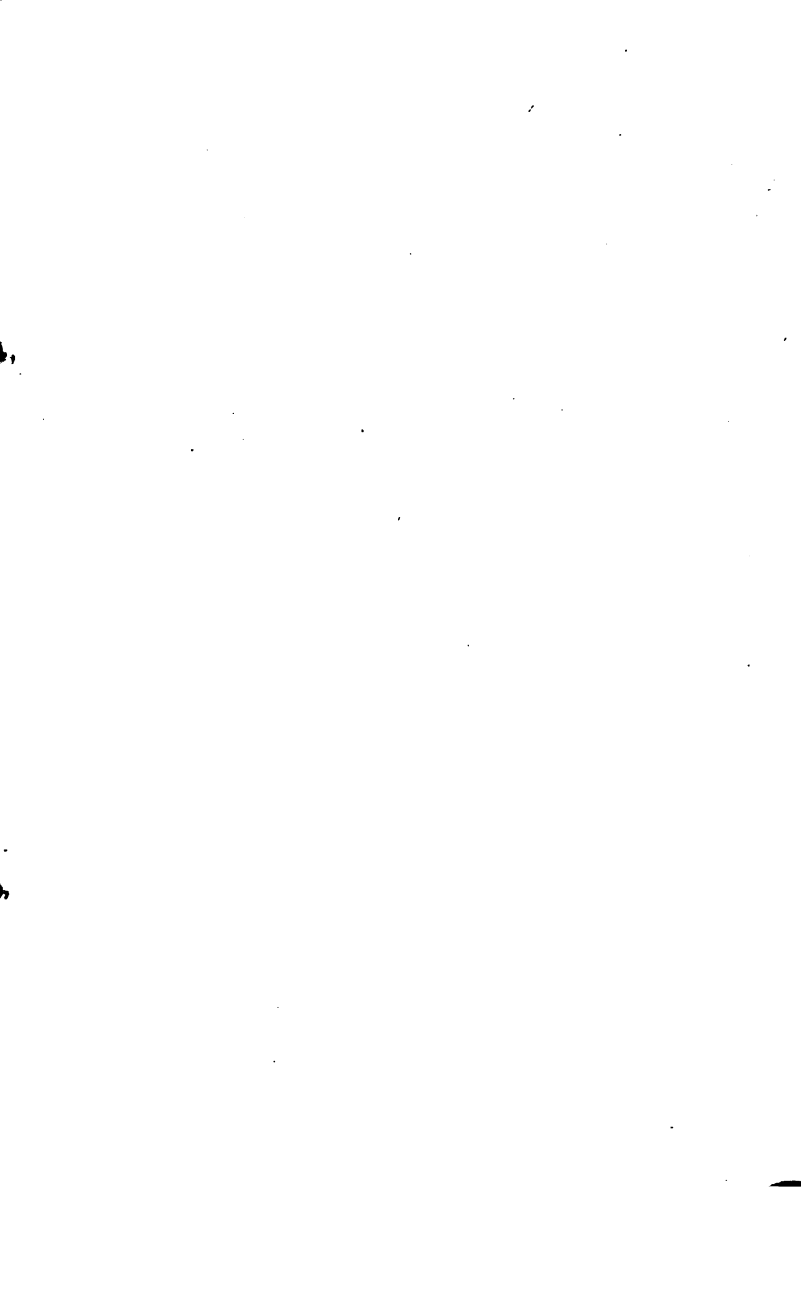
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**SONGS OF ENGLAND**



# SONGS OF ENGLAND

V3809

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

POET LAUREATE

Et dubitamus adhuc virtutem extendere factis?

ÆNEID vi. 806

Why should our Future be less glorious than our Past?

London

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1898

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TO

FIELD MARSHAL

**The Viscount Wolseley, K.P.**

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

MY DEAR WOLSELEY,

A friendship of close on thirty years' standing would of itself account for my desire to tender you the dedication of this volume. But it is less with the friend than with the Soldier and the Patriot that I would fain see it associated. In days, now happily passed away, when to descant on the power and the mission of England was deemed a desecration of the Muse, and almost an outrage on morality, you invariably responded with instant sympathy to any note that vibrated with patriotic sentiment. How could it be otherwise? In your youth you fought and bled for England, and now, in riper years, you devote to her the energy of your mind and the resources of your experience. Long may you continue to do so! Never were they more needed than now, when it has devolved on her to oppose and, if needs be, to defend, her magnanimous policy of Commercial Freedom against exclusive and baneful ambitions.

Believe me, my dear Wolseley,  
Always cordially yours,

**ALFRED AUSTIN.**

FLORENCE, *February* 1898.

recd 11-30-50 MFP



## EXPLANATORY

IN compliance with suggestions frequently received during the last two years, this volume is issued under conditions which place it within the reach, at least, of the many. It contains no pieces that are not to be found elsewhere among the author's Works, but apart from each other, and in the immediate company of other utterances of less national import. All of them, it will be observed,—not excepting "At His Grave" and "The Passing of Merlin," pious tributes to two great Englishmen,—are animated by the same sentiment, and had their origin in the same impulse, love and pride of Country. It only remains to add, in deference to certain generous and legitimate susceptibilities, that in the Sonnets, "Why England Is Conservative," the word "Conservative" is used in no Party sense, and that by "England," for which no other appellation equally comprehensive and convenient has yet been discovered, it is intended to indicate not only Great Britain and Ireland, but Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, and every spot of earth where men feel an instantaneous thrill of imperial kinship at the very sound of the Name that lends its title to the opening poem in the present volume.



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May

## VICTORIA

*June 20, 1837*

*June 20, 1897*

### I

THE lark went up, the mower whet his scythe,  
On golden meads kine ruminating lay,  
And all the world felt young again and blithe,  
Just as to-day.

### II

The partridge shook her covey from her wings,  
And limped along the grass ; on leaf and lawn  
Shimmered the dew, and every throat that sings  
Chanted the dawn.

### III

The doe was followed by her new-dropped fawn,  
And, folding all her feathers on her breast,  
The swan within the reed-mace deep withdrawn  
Dreamed on her nest.

## IV

In the green wheat the poppy burst aflame,  
Wildrose and woodbine garlanded the glade,  
And, twin with maiden Summer, forth there came  
A summer Maid.

## V

Her face was as the face of mid-June when  
Blossoms the meadowsweet, the bindweed  
blows :  
Pale as a lily first She blenched, and then  
Blushed like a rose.

## VI

They placed a Crown upon her fair young brow,  
They put a Sceptre in her girlish hand,  
Saying, "Behold ! You are Sovereign Lady now  
Of this great Land !"

## VII

Silent She gazed, as one who doth not know  
The meaning of a message. When She broke  
The hush of awe around her, 'twas as though  
Her soul that spoke.



## VIII

“With this dread summons, since ’tis Heaven’s  
decree,  
I would not palter, even if I could ;  
But, being a woman only, I can be  
Not great, but good.

## IX

“I cannot don the breastplate and the helm,  
To my weak waist the sword I cannot gird,  
Nor in the discords that distract a Realm  
Be seen or heard.

## X

“But in my People’s wisdom will I share,  
And in their valour play a helpful part,  
Lending them still, in all they do or dare,  
My woman’s heart.

## XI

“And haply it may be that, by God’s grace,  
And unarmed Love’s invulnerable might,  
I may, though woman, lead a manly race  
To higher height ;

## XII

"If wise will curb disorderly desire,  
The Present hold the parent Past in awe,  
Religion hallowing with its sacred fire  
Freedom and Law.

## XIII

"Never be broken, long as I shall reign,  
The solemn covenant 'twixt them and me,  
To keep this Kingdom, moated by the main,  
Loyal yet free."

## XIV

Thus with grave utterance and majestic mien  
She with her eighteen summers filled the  
Throne  
Where Alfred sate : a girl, withal a Queen,  
Aloft, alone !

## XV

But Love that hath the power to force apart  
The bolts and baulk the sentinels of Kings,  
Came o'er the sea, and in her April heart  
Folded his wings.

## XVI

Thenceforth more dear than diadem She owned  
A princely helpmate, sharer in her trust,  
If not her Sceptre :—since, withal, enthroned  
By Time the just.

## XVII

Scorner of wrong, and lover of the right,  
Compounded all of nobleness he seemed,  
And was indeed the perfect gentle Knight  
The poet dreamed.

## XVIII

So when the storm of wrath arose that drove  
Scared Rulers from their realms, Her Throne,  
deep laid  
In liberty and trust, calm shelter gave  
To Kings dismayed.

## XIX

And stronger grew the bond of love and grace  
Betwixt Her and her People, while that She  
Reigned the glad Mother of a Royal race,  
Rulers to be.

## XX

But Death that deepens love in darkening life  
Turned to a pall the purple of her Throne.  
Then, more than once the maid, the widowed wife  
Reigned all alone !

## XXI

"Leave me awhile to linger with the dead,"  
Weeping, She sued. "But doubt not that  
I still  
Am nuptialled to my People, and have wed  
Their deathless will.

## XXII

"Their thoughts shall be my thoughts, their  
aim my aim,  
Their free-lent loyalty my right divine ;  
Mine will I make their triumphs, mine their fame,  
Their sorrows mine.

## XXIII

"And I will be the bond to link them all  
In patriot purpose till my days be done,  
So that, in mind and might, whate'er befall,  
They still keep One."

## XXIV

Then to the winds yet wider was unfurled  
The Flag that tyrants never could enslave,  
Till its strong wisdom governed half the world,  
And all the wave !

## XXV

And, panoplied alike for War or Peace,  
Victoria's England furroweth still the foam  
To harvest Empire, wiser than was Greece,  
Wider than Rome !

## XXVI

Therefore with glowing hearts and proud glad  
tears,  
The children of her Island Realm to-day  
Recall her sixty venerable years  
Of virtuous sway.

## XXVII

Now too from where Saint-Lawrence winds adown  
'Twixt forests felled and plains that feel the  
plough,  
And Ganges jewels the Imperial Crown  
That girds her brow ;

## XXVIII

From Afric's Cape, where loyal watchdogs bark,  
And Britain's Sceptre ne'er shall be withdrawn,  
And that young Continent that greets the dark  
When we the dawn ;

## XXIX

From steel-capped promontories stern and strong,  
And lone isles mounting guard upon the main,  
Hither her subjects wend to hail her long  
Resplendent Reign.

## XXX

And ever when mid-June's musk-roses blow,  
Our Race will celebrate Victoria's name,  
And even England's greatness gain a glow  
From Her pure fame.

## LOOK SEAWARD, SENTINEL !

### I

Look seaward, Sentinel, and tell the land  
What you behold.

### SENTINEL

I see the deep-ploughed furrows of the main  
Bristling with harvest ; funnel, and keel, and  
shroud,  
Heaving and hurrying hither through gale  
and cloud,  
Winged by their burdens ; argosies of grain,  
Flocks of strange breed and herds of southern  
strain,  
Fantastic stuffs and fruits of tropic bloom,  
Antarctic fleece and equatorial spice,  
Cargoes of cotton, and flax, and silk, and rice,  
Food for the hearth and staples for the loom :  
Huge vats of sugar, casks of wine and oil,  
Summoned from every sea to one sole shore  
By Empire's sceptre ; the converging store  
Of Trade's pacific universal spoil.

And heaving and hurrying hitherward to bring  
Tribute from every zone, they lift their voices,  
And, as a strong man revels and rejoices,  
They loudly and lustily chant, and this the song  
they sing.

#### CHORUS OF HOME-COMING SHIPS

From the uttermost bound  
Of the wind and the foam,  
From creek and from sound,  
We are hastening home.  
We are laden with treasure  
From ransacked seas,  
To charm your leisure,  
To grace your ease.  
We have trodden the billows,  
And tracked the ford,  
To soften your pillows,  
To heap your board.  
The hills have been shattered,  
The forests scattered,  
Our white sails tattered,  
To swell your hoard.  
Is it blossom, or fruit, or  
Seed, you crave ?  
The land is your suitor,  
The sea your slave.  
We have raced with the swallows,  
And threaded the flocs



Where the walrus wallows  
Mid melting snows ;  
Sought regions torrid,  
And realms of sleet,  
To gem your forehead,  
To swathe your feet.  
And behold, now we tender,  
With pennons unfurled,  
For your comfort and splendour,  
The wealth of the world.

## II

Look landward, Sentinel, and tell the sea  
What you behold.

## SENTINEL

I see a land of liberty and peace,  
Ancient in glory and strength, but young in  
mien,  
Like immemorial forest Spring makes green,  
And whose boughs broaden as the years increase :  
Where ruminating hide and grazing fleece  
Dapple lush meadows diapered with flowers,  
Lambs bleat, birds carol, rosy children roam,  
The glad hind whistles as he wendeth home,  
And red roofs nestle under gray church-towers :  
Whose sons have in their fearless eyes the light  
Of centuries of fame and battles won  
And Empire ranging roundward with the sun ;

Whose fair frank daughters gleam upon the sight  
Fresh as the dawn and florid as the Spring ;  
And, as from lowly porch and lordly dwelling  
They sally forth and meet, with voices swelling  
Harmoniously they chant, and this the song  
they sing.

#### CHORUS OF ISLANDERS

Blest be the cliffs and the crags that girdle  
Our island home,  
And blest, thrice blest, the tempests that scourge  
and curdle  
The sea into foam.  
For the nations over the wave eat, sleep, and  
labour,  
In doubt and dread ;  
The spear is the child at their threshold, the  
naked sabre  
The bride by their bed.  
But we behind bulwarks of brine and rampart of  
breakers,  
Year after year,  
Drop the seed in the drill and the furrow, and  
harvest our acres,  
And feel no fear.  
While they wattle their flocks, and remember  
the past, and shudder,  
And finger the sword,

Our lambs go safe to the ewes, our calves to the  
udder,  
Our fruits to the board.  
Welcome the sleet that blinds and the blasts that  
buffet,  
And welcome the roar  
Of the storms that swoop on the sea and rend  
and rough it  
Around our shore.  
For in safety the yearling fattens, the heifer  
browzes,  
The herds increase ;  
In safety we fondle our babes, in safety our spouses,  
In safety, freedom, and peace.

## III

Look again seaward, but beyond the sea,  
And say what you behold.

## SENTINEL

I see weeping and wailing, and the bridegroom  
ruthlessly torn  
From the clinging arms of the bride, and I  
see and I hear  
Clanking of steel and clarions clamouring clear,  
And suckling mothers, wedded but forlorn,  
Cradling their babes amid the half-cut corn ;  
Whose fathers, as the homely days grew ripe

When fruits are plucked and mellow harvest  
    stored,  
Felt the soft curving sickle from their gripe  
    Timelessly wrenched, and in its place a sword.  
And I see the nations, like to restless waves,  
    Surging against each other, withal afraid  
To close and clash, lest blade prove strong as  
    blade,  
And even the victor win but worthless graves.  
And, wearying of the days and nights that bring  
    No respite nor reward, they moan and murmur  
    Under their breath, until with accents firmer  
They sadly and surlily chant, and this the song  
    they sing.

#### CHORUS OF ARMED NATIONS

How long shall we, we only, bear the burden  
    And sweat beneath the strain  
Of iron Peace, while others gain the guerdon,  
    And prosper on our pain ?  
Lo ! in their fancied fortress girt with waters  
    That neither fall nor fail,  
They hear of rapine and they read of slaughters,  
    As of some touching tale.  
No more they care to subjugate the billow,  
    Or dominate the blast ;  
Supine they lie on the luxurious pillow  
    Of their resplendent Past.

Lulled into arrogant languor by the glories  
Of their adventurous sires,  
They tell each other old heroic stories  
By comfortable fires.  
Why should they pile up wealth who do not  
labour ?  
Why, sowing not, should reap ?  
Let us steal out, and with unslumbering sabre  
Assassinate their sleep.

## IV

Look again landward, Sentinel, and say  
What there you now behold.

## SENTINEL

I see the sports deserted on the green,  
And song and revel hushed within the hall ;  
And I hear strong voices to strong voices call  
To muster round the shore in martial sheen.  
And north of Trent and south of Thames are  
seen  
Furnace and forge and factory vomiting fire,  
While swarthy faces, labouring through the night,  
On giant anvils giant hammers smite,  
From molten metal moulding hoop and tire.  
In port and arsenal rhythmic thunders ring,  
And through their gateways laden tumbrils  
rattle ;

And England's sinewy striplings, trim for  
battle,  
In unison cheer and chant, and this the song  
they sing.

## CHORUS OF ISLANDERS

Sweet are the ways of peace, and sweet  
The gales that fan the foam  
That sports with silvery-twinkling feet  
Around our island home.  
But, should the winds of battle shrill,  
And the billows crisp their mane,  
Down to the shore, from vale, from hill,  
From hamlet, town, and plain !  
The ocean our forefathers trod  
In many a forest keel,  
Shall feel our feet once more, but shod  
With ligaments of steel.  
Ours is the Sea, to rule, to keep,  
Our realm, and, if ye would  
Challenge dominion of the deep,  
Then make that challenge good.  
But ware ye lest your vauntings proud  
Be coffined in the surge,  
Our breakers be for you a shroud,  
Our battle-song your dirge.  
Peaceful within our peaceful home  
We ply the loom and share,

Peaceful above the peaceful foam  
Our pennons float and fare ;  
Bearing, for other peaceful lands,  
Through sunshine, storm, and snow,  
The harvest of industrious hands  
Peacefully to and fro.  
But, so ye will it, then our sails  
The blasts of war shall swell,  
And hold and hulk, now choked with bales,  
Be crammed with shot and shell.  
The waves impregnably shall bear  
Our bulwarks on their breast,  
And eyes of steel unsleeping glare  
Across each billowy crest ;  
Along the trenches of the deep  
Unflinching faces shine,  
And Britain's stalwart sailors keep  
The bastions of the brine.  
Ocean itself, from strand to strand,  
Our citadel shall be,  
And, though the world together band,  
Not all the legends of the land  
Shall ever wrest from England's hand  
The Sceptre of the Sea.

## ALFRED'S SONG

(FROM "ENGLAND'S DARLING")

IN the Beginning when, out of darkness,  
The Earth, the Heaven,  
The stars, the seasons,  
The mighty mainland,  
And whale-ploughed water,  
By God the Maker  
Were formed and fashioned,  
Then God made England.

He made it shapely,  
With land-locked inlets,  
And gray-green nesses ;  
With rivers roaming  
From fair-leafed forests  
Through windless valleys,  
Past plain and pasture,  
To sloping shingle :  
Thus God made England.



Then like to the long-backed bounding billows,  
That foam and follow  
In rolling ridges,  
Before and after,  
To bluff and headland,  
Hither there tided  
The loose-limbed Briton,  
The lording Roman,  
And strong on his oars the sea-borne Saxon,  
And now the Norsemen  
Who hard with Alfred  
Wrestle for England.

But onward and forward,  
In far days fairer,  
I see this England  
Made one and mighty :  
Mighty and master  
Of all within it.  
Mighty and master  
Of men high-seated,  
Of free-necked labour,  
Lowland and upland,  
And corn and cattle,  
And ploughland peaceful,  
Of happy homesteads  
That warmly nestle  
In holt and hollow.  
This is the England,  
In fair days forward,  
I see and sing of.

Then, mighty and master of all within her,  
Of Celt and Briton,  
Angle and Frisian,  
Saxon and Norseman,  
Shall England plough, like the whale and walrus,  
The roaring ridges  
Of foam-necked water,  
With long-oared warships  
And keels high-beak'd ;  
And never a foeman,  
Eastward or westward,  
Shall dare to raven  
Her salt-sea inlets,  
Her grim gray nesses,  
But, swift at the sight of her rearing cradles,  
Shall scud and scatter,  
Like wild geese fleeing  
'Twixt wave and welkin,  
Away from the dread of the shrilling weapons  
Of foam-fenced England !

## SONNET

(FROM "IN VERONICA'S GARDEN")

HERE, where the vine and fig bask hand in hand,  
And the hot lizard lies along the wall,  
Blinded I shrink where cypress shadows fall,  
And gaze upon the far-off mountains bland :  
Then down the dusty track Lorenzo planned  
Watch the slow oxen oscillating crawl  
Sleek in the sultry glare, and feel withal  
Half alien still in a familiar land.  
But when from out the stone-pine slopes that rise  
In the clear ether, black against the blue,  
The cuckoo suddenly calls, I close mine eyes  
In visionary rapture, think of you,  
Hear the home-music of your Kentish skies,  
And dream that I am drenched with English dew.

WHO WOULD NOT DIE FOR  
ENGLAND!

*Whippingham—Sandringham, February 1896*

WHO would not die for England !

This great thought,  
Through centuries of Glory handed down  
By storied vault in monumental fane,  
And homeless grave in lone barbaric lands,  
Homeless but not forgotten, so can thrill  
With its imperious call the hearts of men,  
That suddenly from dwarf ignoble lives  
They rise to heights of nobleness, and spurn  
The languid couch of safety, to embrace  
Duty and Death that evermore were twin.

**“Who would not die for England !”**

Thus He said,  
Who at the holiest of all English hearths,  
The holiest and the highest, had been given  
A seat, an English Princess for his Bride,—  
Now at that hearth weeping her widowed tears,

Bitter and barren as the winter rain.  
"It is not meet that I, whom this famed Isle,  
This generous, mighty, and majestic Land,  
Ennobled as her son, should not repay  
Her splendid gift of kinship. Let me go,  
Go where they go, Her world-researching race,  
That slumber pillowed on the half-drawn sword,  
And wake at whisper of her will, to greet  
Duty and Death that evermore were twin."

Who would not die for England !

And for Her  
He dies, who, whether in the fateful fight,  
Or in the marish jungle, where She bids,  
Far from encircling fondness, far from kiss  
Of clinging babes, hushes his human heart,  
And, stern to every voice but Hers, obeys  
Duty and Death that evermore were twin.

So across the far-off foam,  
Bring him hither, bring him home,  
Over avenues of wave,—  
English ground,—to English grave ;  
Where his soldier dust may rest,  
England's Flag above his breast,  
And, love-tended, long may bloom  
English flowers about his tomb.

Who would not die for England, that can give  
A sepulture like this, 'mid hamlet crofts,

34 WHO WOULD NOT DIE FOR ENGLAND !

And comely cottages with old-world flowers,  
And rustic seats for labour-palsied limbs,  
The pensioners of Peace ! I linger here,  
Pondering the dark inexplicable Night,  
Here by this river-girt sequestered shrine  
Whose vanished walls were reared anew by Him,  
Of Princes the most princely, if it be  
That Wisdom, Love, and Virtue more adorn  
Sarcophagus of Kings than dripping spears,  
Lone wailing hearths and hecatombs of slain.  
And He too died for England, He who lived  
Scorning all joy save that great joy of all,  
The love of one true woman, She a Queen,  
Empress and Queen, yet not the more revered,  
Not the more loved, for those resounding names,  
Than for the lowlier titles, Gracious, Good,  
The Worthiest of Women ever crowned.

Sweetest Consort, sagest Prince !  
Snows on snows have melted since  
England lost you ;—late to learn  
Worth that never can return ;  
Learned to know you as you were,  
Known, till then, alone to Her !  
Luminous as sun at noon,  
Tender as the midnight moon,  
Steadfast as the steered-by star,  
Wise as Time and Silence are :  
Deaf to vain-belittling lie,  
Deaf to gibing jealousy ;

Thinking only of the goal,  
And, like every lofty soul,  
Scanning with a far-off smile  
The revilings of the vile.

Yes, He too died for England ! thence withdrawn  
Dim to that undiscoverable land  
Where our lost loved ones dwell with wistful eyes,  
And lips that look but speak not. . . . But away !  
Away from these soft-whispering waves that make  
A dulcet dirge around the new-delved grave,  
To bluff East-Anglia, where on wind-swept lawns  
The sanguine crocus peeps from underground  
To feel the sun and only finds the snow ;  
And, whinnying on the norland blast, the surge  
Leaps against iron coast with iron hoof,  
As though the hosts of Denmark foamed afresh,  
Caparisoned for ravin ! And I see  
A cradle, not a coffin, and therein  
Another Child to England ; and, veiled Fate  
Over it bent with deep-divining gaze,  
And with oracular lips, like nurse inspired,  
Foretelling the fair Future.

“ Another Albert shalt Thou be, so known,  
So known, so honoured, and His name shall stand  
The sponsor to your spotlessness, until  
Dawns the full day when, conscious of your soul,  
Your soul, your self, and that high mission laid  
On all of such begetting, you may seize

36 WHO WOULD NOT DIE FOR ENGLAND !

The sceptre of your will, and, thus-wise armed  
Against the sirens of disloyal sense,  
Like to your pure progenitor abide  
In God's stern presence, and surrender never  
That last prerogative of all your race,  
To live and die for England ! ”



## AT HIS GRAVE

### I

LEAVE me a little while alone,  
Here at his grave that still is strewn  
    With crumbling flower and wreath ;  
The laughing rivulet leaps and falls,  
The thrush exults, the cuckoo calls,  
    And he lies hushed beneath.

### II

With myrtle cross and crown of rose,  
And every lowlier flower that blows,  
    His new-made couch is dressed ;  
Primrose and cowslip, hyacinth wild,  
Gathered by Monarch, peasant, child,  
    A nation's grief attest.

### III

I stood not with the mournful crowd  
That hither came when round his shroud  
    Pious farewells were said.

## AT HIS GRAVE

In the famed city that he saved,  
By minaret crowned, by billow laved,  
I heard that he was dead.

## IV

Now o'er his tomb at last I bend,  
No greeting get, no greeting tend,  
Who never came before  
Unto his presence, but I took,  
From word or gesture, tone or look,  
Some wisdom from his door.

## V

And must I now unanswered wait,  
And, though a suppliant at the gate,  
No sound my ears rejoice?  
Listen! . Yes, even as I stand,  
I feel the pressure of his hand,  
The comfort of his voice.

## VI

How poor were Fame, did grief confess  
That death can make a great life less,  
Or end the help it gave!  
Our wreaths may fade, our flowers may wane,  
But his well-ripened deeds remain,  
Untouched, above his grave.

## VII

Let this, too, soothe our widowed minds ;  
Silenced are the opprobrious winds  
    Whene'er the sun goes down ;  
And, free henceforth from noonday noise,  
He at a tranquil height enjoys  
    The starlight of renown.

## VIII

Thus hence we something more may take  
Than sterile grief, than formless ache,  
    Or vainly-uttered vow ;  
Death hath bestowed what life withheld,  
And he round whom detraction swelled,  
    Hath peace with honour now.

## IX

The open jeer, the covert taunt,  
The falsehood coined in factious haunt,  
    These loving gifts reprove.  
They never were but thwarted sound  
Of ebbing waves that bluster round  
    A rock that will not move.

## X

And now the idle roar rolls off ;  
Hushed is the gibe and shamed the scoff,  
    Repressed the envious gird ;

## AT HIS GRAVE

Since death, the looking-glass of life,  
Cleared of the misty breath of strife,  
Reflects his face unblurred.

## XI

From callow youth to mellow age,  
Men turn the leaf and scan the page,  
And note, with smart of loss,  
How wit to wisdom did mature,  
How duty burned ambition pure,  
And purged away the dross.

## XII

Youth is self-love ; our manhood lends  
Its heart to pleasure, mistress, friends,  
So that, when age steals nigh,  
How few find any worthier aim  
Than to protract a flickering flame,  
Whose oil hath long run dry !

## XIII

But he, unwitting youth once flown,  
With England's greatness linked his own,  
And, steadfast to that part,  
Held praise and blame but fitful sound,  
And in the love of country found  
Full solace for his heart.

## XIV

Now in an English grave he lies :  
With flowers that tell of English skies  
And mind of English air,  
A grateful Sovereign decks his bed,  
And hither long with pilgrim tread  
With English feet repair.

## XV

Yet not beside his grave alone  
We seek the glance, the touch, the tone ;  
His home is nigh,—but there,  
See from the hearth his figure fled,  
The pen unraised, the page unread,  
Untenanted the chair !

## XVI

Vainly the beechen boughs have made  
A fresh green canopy of shade,  
Vainly the peacocks stray ;  
While Carlo, with despondent gait,  
Wonders how long affairs of State  
Will keep his lord away.

## XVII

Here most we miss the guide, the friend.  
Back to the churchyard let me wend  
And, by the posied mound,

Lingering where late stood worthier feet,  
Wish that some voice, more strong, more sweet,  
A loftier dirge would sound.

## XVIII

At least I bring not tardy flowers.  
Votive to him life's budding powers,  
Such as they were, I gave—  
He not rejecting : so I may  
Perhaps these poor faint spices lay,  
Unhidden, on his grave !

HUGHENDEN, *May* 1881.

## WHY ENGLAND IS CONSERVATIVE

### I

BECAUSE of our dear Mother, the fair Past,  
On whom twin Hope and Memory safely lean,  
And from whose fostering wisdom none shall  
wean

Their love and faith, while love and faith shall  
last :

Mother of happy homes and Empire vast,  
Of hamlets meek, and many a proud demesne,  
Blue spires of cottage smoke 'mong woodlands  
green,

And comely altars where no stone is cast.

And shall we barter these for gaping Throne,  
Dismantled towers, mean plots without a tree,  
A herd of hinds too equal to be free,

Greedy of other's, jealous of their own,

And, where sweet Order now breathes cadenced  
tone,

Envy, and hate, and all uncharity ?

## II

Banish the fear ! 'Twere infamy to yield  
To folly what to force had been denied,  
Or in the Senate quail before the tide  
We should have stemmed and routed in the field.  
What though no more we brandish sword and  
    shield,  
Reason's keen blade is ready at our side,  
And manly brains, in wisdom panoplied,  
Can foil the shafts that treacherous sophists wield.  
The spirit of our fathers is not quelled.  
With weapons valid even as those they bore,  
Domain, Throne, Altar, still may be upheld,  
So we disdain, as they disdained of yore,  
The foreign froth that foams against our shore,  
Only by its white cliffs to be repelled !

## III

Therefore, chime sweet and safely, village bells,  
And, rustic chancels, woo to reverent prayer,  
And, wise and simple, to the porch repair  
Round which Death, slumbering, dreamlike  
    heaves and swells.  
Let hound and horn in wintry woods and dells  
Make jocund music though the boughs be bare,  
And whistling yokel guide his gleaming share  
Hard by the homes where gentle lordship dwells.  
Therefore sit high enthroned on every hill,



Authority ! and loved in every vale ;  
Nor, old Tradition, falter in the tale  
Of lowly valour led by lofty will :  
And, though the throats of envy rage and rail,  
Be fair proud England proud fair England still !

## ON RETURNING TO ENGLAND

THERE ! once again I stand on home,  
Though round me still there swirls the foam,  
Leaping athwart the vessel's track  
To bid a wanderer welcome back,  
And though as yet through softening haze  
White cliffs but vaguely greet my gaze.  
For, England ! yours the waves, the spray,  
And, be one's foothold what it may,  
Wherever billow wafts or wends,  
Your soil is trodden, your shore extends.  
How stern ! how sweet ! Though fresh from  
lands

Where soft seas heave on slumbering strands,  
And zephyrs moistened by the south  
Seem kisses from an infant's mouth,  
My northern blood exults to face  
The rapture of this rough embrace,  
Glowing in every vein to feel  
The cordial caress of steel  
From spear-blue air and sword-blue sea,  
The armour of your liberty.

Braced by the manly air, I reach  
My soul out to the approaching beach,  
And own, the instant I arrive,  
The dignity of being alive !

And now with forward-faring feet  
Eager I leap to land, and greet  
The hearty grasp, the honest gaze,  
The voice that means the thing it says,  
The gait of men by birthright free,  
Unceremonial courtesy.  
None frown, none cringe, but, fearless-eyed,  
Are kindly all ; since, side by side,  
Authority and Freedom reign  
In twin equality, and drain  
Their sanction from the self-same breast,  
And Law is wise Will manifest.  
Yes, this is England, frank and fair :  
I tread its turf, I breathe its air,  
And catch from every stalwart lung  
The music of my mother tongue.

And who are these that cluster round  
With hastening feet and silvery sound,  
And eyes as liquid as the dawn,  
When laughs the dew on Kentish lawn ?  
These England's daughters, frank yet arch,  
Supple as April, strong as March :  
Like pink-white windflowers in the grove,  
That came while east and west wind strove

For mastery, and Spring seemed late,  
Hardy alike and delicate.  
How well their faces fit the scene,  
The copses gray, the hedgerows green,  
The white-veiled blackthorn, gorse afire,  
The cottage yew, the village spire ;  
The pastures flecked with frisking lambs  
Around their gravely grazing dams ;  
The children loitering home from school,  
Their hands and pinafores all full  
Of cuckoo-pint and bluebell spike,  
Gathered in dingle, dell, and dyke ;  
The comely homes one just can see  
Through flowering belts of bush and tree,  
That all combine, all, all conspire,  
To more than satisfy desire,  
To make one love this lovely earth,  
And bless Heaven for one's British birth.

Bewitching climes ! where late I sought  
In change of scene a change of thought,  
Refreshment from familiar ground,  
And, what I sought for, more than found,  
Where old enchantment haunteth still  
Ligurian coast and Tuscan hill,  
Climes I have ventured oft and long  
To celebrate in faltering song,  
Where fearless almond, faery larch,  
Smiling, disarm the frown of March,  
Snow hath no terrors, frost no sting,

And playful Winter mimics Spring,  
Deem me not thankless, nor deny  
Fresh welcome from your shore and sky,  
Repose from thought so oft implored,  
And ne'er refused, if, now restored  
By you to health, by you to home,  
Glad I return, late glad to roam.  
For dear to me though wayside shrine  
By silent gorge or murmuring brine ;  
Dear though the barefoot peasant folk  
Who lop the vine and steer the yoke  
Of soft-eyed, sleek-skinned, creamy beeves,  
Up narrow ways to broad slant eaves ;  
The stony mule-tracks twisting slow  
Up slopes where cherry-blossoms blow  
'Mid olive gray and ilex brown,  
On to some sun-bronzed mountain town ;  
The hush and cool of marble domes,  
Where, wed to reverie, one roams  
Through transept, chancel, cloister, cell,  
Where still with far-off faces dwell  
Sages and saints devoutly limned  
By hands long dust and eyes long dimmed ;  
Dear though all these, and ne'er forgot,  
No southern shore, no sunniest spot,  
Not Roccabruna's hamlet crest,  
Not Eza's brow, not Taggia's breast,  
Not Bellosguardo's sunset hour,  
Not Dante's seat nor Giotto's Tower,  
Nor even Spiaggiascura's foam,

Moisten and melt my heart like home.  
For here the cuckoo seems more glad,  
The nightingale more sweetly sad,  
Primroses more akin in gaze  
To childlike wonder, childlike ways ;  
And all things that one sees and hears,  
Since rooted in the bygone years,  
And blending with their warm caress  
A touch of homely tenderness,  
Bid the quick instinct in one's blood  
Pay tribute unto motherhood.  
How should strange lands, it boots not where,  
Divorce one from one's native air,  
Or in a loyal breast dethrone  
Unreasoning reverence for one's own ?  
Yet love and reason surely blend  
To stir this passion and commend ?  
And who will blame if, though one seeks  
In gentler tides, and sterner peaks  
That tower above a wider plain,  
Contrast to northern hill and main,  
I cherish still and hold apart  
The fondest feeling in my heart  
For where, beneath one's parent sky,  
Our dear ones live, our dead ones lie ?

And you, dear friend, who linger still  
Beside the iris-crested rill  
That silvers through your olives gray  
From convent-capped Fiesole,

Think not that I forget, forswear,  
The scenes we lately vowed so fair.  
To these your wandering footsteps bring  
The freshness of an English Spring ;  
And even Florence sunnier glows,  
When Phyllis prattles and Ivor crows.  
And, though among them still you stray,  
Sweet-lengthening-out a Tuscan May,  
You too will here return before  
Our Northern roses blow once more,  
To prove to all of kindred birth,  
For winsome grace and sterling worth,  
Nothing can match, where'er we roam,  
An English wife in English home.

## IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

### I

Is life worth living? Yes, so long  
As Spring revives the year,  
And hails us with the cuckoo's song,  
To show that she is here ;  
So long as May of April takes,  
In smiles and tears, farewell,  
And windflowers dapple all the brakes,  
And primroses the dell ;  
While children in the woodlands yet  
Adorn their little laps  
With ladysmock and violet,  
And daisy-chain their caps ;  
While over orchard daffodils  
Cloud-shadows float and fleet,  
And ousel pipes and laverock trills,  
And young lambs buck and bleat ;  
So long as that which bursts the bud  
And swells and tunes the rill,  
Makes springtime in the maiden's blood,  
Life is worth living still.



## II

Life not worth living ! Come with me,  
Now that, through vanishing veil,  
Shimmers the dew on lawn and lea,  
And milk foams in the pail ;  
Now that June's sweltering sunlight bathes  
With sweat the striplings lithe,  
As fall the long straight scented swathes  
Over the crescent scythe ;  
Now that the throstle never stops  
His self-sufficing strain,  
And woodbine-trails festoon the copse,  
And eglantine the lane ;  
Now rustic labour seems as sweet  
As leisure, and blithe herds  
Wend homeward with unwearied feet,  
Carolling like the birds ;  
Now all, except the lover's vow,  
And nightingale, is still ;  
Here, in the twilight hour, allow,  
Life is worth living still.

## III

When Summer, lingering half-forlorn,  
On Autumn loves to lean,  
And fields of slowly yellowing corn  
Are girt by woods still green ;  
When hazel-nuts wax brown and plump,  
And apples rosy-red,

And the owlet hoots from hollow stump,  
And the dormouse makes its bed ;  
When crammed are all the granary floors,  
And the Hunter's moon is bright,  
And life again is sweet indoors,  
And logs again alight ;  
Aye, even when the houseless wind  
Waileth through cleft and chink,  
And in the twilight maids grow kind,  
And jugs are filled and clink ;  
When children clasp their hands and pray  
"Be done Thy heavenly will !"  
Who doth not lift his voice, and say,  
"Life is worth living still" ?

## IV

Is life worth living ? Yes, so long  
As there is wrong to right,  
Wail of the weak against the strong,  
Or tyranny to fight ;  
Long as there lingers gloom to chase,  
Or streaming tear to dry,  
One kindred woe, one sorrowing face  
That smiles as we draw nigh :  
Long as at tale of anguish swells  
The heart, and lids grow wet,  
And at the sound of Christmas bells  
We pardon and forget ;  
So long as Faith with Freedom reigns,  
And loyal Hope survives,

And gracious Charity remains  
To leaven lowly lives ;  
While there in one untrodden tract  
For Intellect or Will,  
And men are free to think and act  
Life is worth living still.

## v

Not care to live while English homes  
Nestle in English trees,  
And England's Trident-Sceptre roams  
Her territorial seas !  
Not live while English songs are sung  
Wherever blows the wind,  
And England's laws and England's tongue  
Enfranchise half mankind !  
So long as in Pacific main,  
Or on Atlantic strand,  
Our kin transmit the parent strain,  
And love the Mother-Land ;  
So long as in this ocean Realm,  
Victoria and her Line  
Retain the heritage of the helm,  
By loyalty divine ;  
So long as flashes English steel,  
And English trumpets shrill,  
He is dead already who doth not feel  
Life is worth living still.

## IN PRAISE OF ENGLAND

### I

FROM tangled brake and trellised bower  
Bring every bud that blows,  
But never will you find the flower  
To match an English rose.  
It blooms with more than city grace,  
Though rustic and apart ;  
It has a smile upon its face,  
And a dewdrop in its heart.

### II

Though wide the goodly world around  
Your fancy may have strayed,  
Where was the woman ever found  
To match an English maid ?  
At work she smiles, through play she sings,  
She doubts not nor denies ;  
She'll cling to you as woodbine clings,  
And love you till she dies.

## III

If you would put it to the proof,  
Then round the zodiac roam ;  
But never will you find the roof  
To match an English home.  
You hear the sound of children's feet  
Still pattering on the stair :  
'Tis made by loving labour sweet,  
And sanctified by prayer.

## IV

Go traverse tracts sublime or sweet,  
Snow-peak or scorched ravine,  
But where will you the landscape meet  
To match an English scene ?  
The hamlet hallowed by its spire,  
The wildwood fresh with flowers,  
Garden and croft and thorp and byre  
Gleaming through silvery showers.

## V

Across the wave, along the wind,  
Flutter and plough your way,  
But where will you a Sceptre find  
To match the English Sway ?  
Its conscience holds the world in awe  
With blessing or with ban ;  
Its Freedom guards the Reign of Law,  
And majesty of Man !

## THREE SONNETS

WRITTEN IN MID-CHANNEL

### I

Now upon English soil I soon shall stand,  
Homeward from climes that fancy deems more  
fair ;  
And well I know that there will greet me there  
No soft foam fawning upon smiling strand,  
No scent of orange-groves, no zephyrs bland,  
But Amazonian March, with breast half bare  
And sleety arrows whistling through the air,  
Will be my welcome from that burly land.  
Yet he who boasts his birthplace yonder lies,  
Owns in his heart a mood akin to scorn  
For sensuous slopes that bask 'neath Southern  
skies,  
Teeming with wine and prodigal of corn,  
And, gazing through the mist with misty eyes,  
Blesses the brave bleak land where he was born.

## II

And wherefore feels he thus ? Because its shore  
Nor conqueror's foot nor despot's may defile,  
But Freedom walks unarmed about the isle,  
And Peace sits musing beside each man's door.  
Beyond these straits, the wild-beast mob may  
    roar,  
Elsewhere the veering demagogue beguile :  
We, hand in hand with the Past, look on and  
    smile,  
And tread the ways our fathers trod before.  
What though some wretch, whose glory you  
    may trace  
Past lonely hearths and unrecorded graves,  
Round his Sword-sceptre summoning swarms of  
    slaves,  
Menace *our* shores with conflict or disgrace,—  
We laugh behind the bulwark of the waves,  
And fling the foam defiant in his face.

## III

And can it be,—when Heaven this deep moat  
    made,  
And filled it with the ungovernable seas,  
Gave us the winds for rampart, waves for frise,  
Behind which Freedom, elsewhere if betrayed,  
Might shelter find, and flourish unafraid,—

That men who learned to lisp at English knees  
Of English fame, to pamper womanish ease  
And swell the surfeits of voracious trade  
Shall the impregnable breakers undermine,  
Take ocean in reverse, and, basely bold,  
Burrow beneath the bastions of the brine?—  
Nay, England, if the citadel be sold  
For lucre thus, Tarpeia's doom be thine,  
And perish smothered in a grave of gold!

*March 1882.*



## THE PASSING OF MERLIN

I am Merlin,  
And I am dying,  
I am Merlin  
Who follow The Gleam.  
TENNYSON'S *Merlin and The Gleam*.

### I

MERLIN has gone—has gone !—and through the  
land  
The melancholy message wings its way ;  
To careless-ordered garden by the bay,  
Back o'er the narrow strait to island strand,  
Where Camelot looks down on wild Broceliand.

### II

Merlin has gone, Merlin the Wizard who found,  
In the Past's glimmering tide, and hailed him  
King,  
Arthur, great Uther's son, and so did sing  
The mystic glories of the Table Round,  
That ever its name will live so long as Song  
shall sound.

## III

Merlin has gone, Merlin who followed the Gleam,  
And made us follow it ; the flying tale  
Of the Last Tournament, the Holy Grail,  
And Arthur's Passing ; till the Enchanter's dream  
Dwells with us still awake, no visionary theme.

## IV

To-day is dole in Astolat, and dole  
In Celidon the forest, dole and tears.  
In Joyous Gard blackhooded lean the spears :  
The nuns of Almesbury sound a mournful toll,  
And Guinevere kneeling weeps, and prays for  
Merlin's soul.

## V

A wailing cometh from the shores that veil  
Avilion's island valley ; on the mere,  
Looms through the mist and wet winds weeping  
blear  
A dusky barge, which, without oar or sail,  
Fades to the far-off fields where falls nor snow  
nor hail.

## VI

Of all his wounds He will be heal'd now,  
Wounds of harsh time and vulnerable life,  
Fatigue of rest and weariness of strife,

Doubt and the long deep questionings that plough  
The forehead of age but bring no harvest to the  
brow.

## VII

And there He will be comforted ; but we  
Must watch, like Bedivere, the dwindling light  
That slowly shrouds Him darkling from our sight.  
From the great deep to the great deep hath He  
Passed, and, if now He knows, is mute eternally.

## VIII

From Somersby's ivied tower there sinks and  
swells  
A low slow peal, that mournfully is rolled  
Over the long gray fields and glimmering wold,  
To where, 'twixt sandy tracts and moorland fells,  
Remembers Locksley Hall his musical farewells.

## IX

And many a sinewy youth on Cam to-day  
Suspends the dripping oar and lets his boat  
Like dreaming water-lily drift and float,  
While murmuring to himself the undying lay  
That haunts the babbling Wye and Severn's  
dirgeful bay.

## X

The bole of the broad oak whose knotted knees  
Lie hidden in the fern of Sumner Place,  
Feels stirred afresh, as when Olivia's face  
Lay warm against its rind, though now it sees  
Not Love but Death approach, and shivers in  
the breeze.

## XI

In many a Vicarage garden, dense with age,  
The haunt of pairing throistles, many a grange  
Moated against the assault and siege of change,  
Fair eyes consult anew the cherished Sage,  
And now and then a tear falls blistering the page.

## XII

April will blossom again, again will ring  
With cuckoo's call and yaffel's flying scream,  
And in veiled sleep the nightingale will dream,  
Warbling as if awake. But what will bring  
His sweet note back? He mute, it scarcely will  
be Spring.

## XIII

The Seasons sorrow for Him, and the Hours  
Droop, like to bees belated in the rain.  
The unmoving shadow of a pensive pain

Lies on the lawn and lingers on the flowers,  
And sweet and sad seem one in woodbine-woven  
bowers.

## XIV

In English gardens fringed with English foam,  
Or girt with English woods, He loved to dwell,  
Singing of English lives in thorp or dell,  
Orchard or croft ; so that, when now we roam  
Through them, and find Him not, it scarcely  
feels like home.

## XV

And England's glories stirred Him as the swell  
Of bluff winds blowing from Atlantic brine  
Stirs mightier music in the murmuring pine.  
Then sweet notes waxed to strong within his  
shell,  
And bristling rose the lines, and billowy rose  
and fell.

## XVI

So England mourns for Merlin, though its tears  
Flow not from bitter source that wells in vain,  
But kindred rather to the rippling rain  
That brings the daffodil sheath and jonquil spears,  
When Winter weeps away and April reappears.

## XVII

For never hath England lacked a voice to sing  
Her fairness and her fame, nor will she now.  
Silence awhile may brood upon the bough,  
But shortly once again the Isle will ring  
With wakening winds of March and rhapsodies  
of Spring.

## XVIII

From Arthur unto Alfred, Alfred crowned  
Monarch and Minstrel both, to Edward's day,  
From Edward to Elizabeth, the lay  
Of valour and love hath never ceased to sound,  
But Song and Sword are twin, indissolubly bound.

## XIX

Nor shall in Britain Taliessin tire  
Transmitting through his stock the sacred strain.  
When fresh renown prolongs Victoria's Reign,  
Some patriot hand will sweep the living lyre,  
And prove, with native notes, that Merlin was  
his sire.

## TO ENGLAND

MEN deemed thee fallen, did they? fallen like  
Rome,  
Coiled into self to foil a Vandal throng :  
Not wholly shorn of strength, but vainly strong ;  
Weaned from thy fame by a too happy home,  
Scanning the ridges of thy teeming loam,  
Counting thy flocks, humming thy harvest song,  
Callous, because thyself secure, 'gainst wrong,  
Behind the impassable fences of the foam !  
The dupes ! Thou dost but stand erect, and lo !  
The nations cluster round ; and while the horde  
Of wolfish backs slouch homeward to their snow,  
Thou, 'mid thy sheaves in peaceful seasons stored,  
Towerest supreme, victor without a blow,  
Smilingly leaning on thy undrawn sword !

*April 1878.*

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A SELECTION FROM THE LYRICAL  
POEMS OF ALFRED AUSTIN

EDITED, WITH A PREFACE,  
By WILLIAM WATSON

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## *EXTRACT FROM THE PREFACE*

"A nobly filial love of Country, and a tenderly passionate *love of the country*—these appear to me the two dominant notes of this volume. The phrases themselves stand for things widely different, but it seems fated that the things themselves should be found present together or together absent. . . . Our literature prior to Lord Tennyson contains no such full utterance of this dual passion, this enthusiasm of nationality underlying an intimate and affectionate knowledge of every bird that makes an English summer melodious, and every flower that sweetens English air; and it seems to me that if the question be asked, 'Who among the poets of a later generation can be said to share with Lord Tennyson the quality of being in this double sense English through and through?' any competent person trying to answer the question honestly will find the name of the author of this volume of *English Lyrics* the first to rise to his lips."

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